

# **The Relationship Between Psychological Empowerment And Organizational Commitment: A Study Among Employees In Construction Sector In Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia**

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## ***Abstract***

This research aims to investigate the relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational commitment among employees in the construction sector in Kota Kinabalu area. Psychological empowerment dimensions namely meaning, competence, self-determination and impact are the independent variables. The dependent variable is the organizational commitment. Moderating variables consist of education level and length of service. Each of these dimensions was tested to see its relationship with the organizational commitment. The objectives of this study are, firstly, to measure the level of psychological empowerment and organizational commitment among the respondents; secondly, to examine the relationship between independent variables and dependent variable; and thirdly, to investigate whether the education level and length of service moderate the relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational commitment. Questionnaires were distributed to 171 employees from various backgrounds and positions working in the construction sector in Kota Kinabalu. The questionnaire for psychological empowerment was adapted from Spreitzer (1995) and for organizational commitment the questionnaire developed by Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979) had been used. Twelve hypotheses were developed and tested using regression analysis assisted by Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 15.0. The findings indicate that when the construction employees feel empowered by giving them autonomy, freedom and opportunity in determining how they do their job, they will be more committed to their organization and put the best effort to ensure the sustainability of the organization. In addition, if the employees are directly involved in outcomes that affect the organization and the more the individuals are involved in decision making, the more committed they would be to their organization. The research findings show that education level and length of service did not significantly moderate the relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational commitment. The implications of each variables and further suggestions for future research are identified and proposed.

**Keywords :** Psychological empowerment, organizational commitment

## Introduction

The major sources of competitive advantage will lie not only in new technology but in the dedication, the quality of the commitment and competence of the workforce. The results of the human capital energy and creativity are the company's most important resource. Empowerment is the new fuel for the growing and booming workplace (Scott & Jaffe, 1993). Moreover, according to Lawler, Mohrman and Benson, (2001, cited in Spreitzer, 2007) today, more than 70 percent of organizations have adopted some kind of empowerment initiative for at least part of their workforce. Other than that, to be successful in today's business environment, companies need the knowledge, ideas, energy, and creativity of every employee, from front line workers to the top level managers in the executive suite. Even though empowerment is a good management practices but not everyone opt for it. Firstly, on the manager's side, they fear of losing the power, control, and authority over their employees. Trust is another issue because most of the time they are not trust the employee because may be sharing information means leaking ideas, plans, and knowledge to competitors. Secondly, on employee's side, they are reluctant to make responsible decision as they don't want to be blame for any mistakes arise from the decision.

Hence, this study is trying to answer these questions: "Is there any relationship between each component of the four dimensions in psychological empowerment (PE) and organizational commitment (OC)?" and "To what extent do the employee's demographic characteristic such as education level and length of service moderate the relationship between PE and OC?". Accordingly, the objectives of the study are: i) to measure the level of psychological empowerment and organizational commitment among employees in the construction sector in Kota Kinabalu area; ii) to examine the relationship between psychological empowerment (meaning, competence, self-determination and impact) and organizational commitment among employees in the construction sector in Kota Kinabalu; and iii) to investigate whether education level and length of service moderate the relationship between PE and OC.

## Literature Review

*Psychological Empowerment* - As mentions earlier on, this study will focus on the psychological empowerment perspective. Psychological empowerment refers to a set of psychological states that are necessary for individuals to feel a sense of control in relation to their work. Rather than focusing on managerial practices that share power with employees at all levels, the psychological perspective is focused on how employees experience their work. This perspective refers to empowerment as the personal beliefs that employees have about their role in relation to the organization (Spreitzer, 2007). According to Spreitzer the four dimensions of psychological empowerment are as follows: *Meaning* involves a fit between the needs of one's work role and one's beliefs, values and behaviors (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). *Competence* refers to self-efficacy specific to one's work, or a belief in one's capability to perform work activities with skill (Gist, 1987; Bandura, 1989, cited in Spreitzer, 2007). *Self-determination* is a sense of choice in initiating and regulating one's actions (Deci, Connell and Ryan, 1989). It reflects a sense of autonomy or choice over the initiation and continuation of work behavior and processes (e.g., making decisions about work methods, pace, and effort; Bell and Staw, 1989, cited in Spreitzer, 2007). *Impact* is the degree to which one can influence strategic, administrative, or operating outcomes at work (Ashforth, 1989, cited in Spreitzer, 2007).

Arsiah (2006) discusses a variety of meanings, concepts and structure of psychological empowerment that have been explored and derived from previous scholars and practitioner's researches such as from Bandura (1986) who articulated empowerment as construct in terms of self-efficacy; Conger and Kanungo (1988) who refers empowerment to a process whereby an individual's belief in their self-efficacy is enhanced; Konczak et.al (2000) who sought empowerment through the leader's behavior; Thomas and Velthouse (1990) defined empowerment as increased intrinsic motivation while Spreitzer (1995) has extended it at the workplace; Corsen and Enz (1999) examined the impact of psychological empowerment of service workers in terms of support-based relationships; and Menon (2001) defined empowerment as a psychological state manifested in perceived control, competence and goal; just to name a few.

A few studies have found that job satisfaction and psychological empowerment shows positive relationship (Wu & Short, 1996; Koberg et al., 1999; Davis & Wilson, 2000; Liden et al. (2000); Laschinger et al., 2001, Savery & Luks, 2001; Laschinger et al., 2002; Holdsworth & Cartwright, 2003 and Dewettinck et al., 2003). These research revealed that empowered employees are more likely to be satisfied with their job compared with less empowered employees. Of the four empowerment dimensions, the strongest theoretical argument for positive relationship to job satisfaction was meaningfulness (Liden et al., 2000). It was emphasized in late fifties by Herzberg (1959)

(Dewettinck et al., 2003) which is an important precondition of job satisfaction that the individual finds work personally meaningful. In contrast, according to Thomas and Velthouse (1990) low level of meaning have been linked to apathy at work and hence lower level of job satisfaction.

Second variable that attracted more researchers is job commitment such as research conducted by Cunningham and Hyman (1996), McDermott, Lashinger, and Shamian (1996), Wu and Short (1996), Kraimer, Seibert and Liden (1999), Liden et al. (2001), Laschinger et al. (2001), Dee et al. (2003) and Dewettinck (2003). All these study show that not all psychological empowerment dimensions have positive relationship to particular variables. For example, Kraimer et al. (1999) found that only self-determination and impact dimension have positive relationship with organizational commitment. On the other hand, influence of type of work (management and non-management) in relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational commitment has been conducted by Cunningham and Hyman (1996). They pointed out that, psychological empowerment among the management staff increased their commitment. However, for non-management staffs, psychological empowerment creates problem to them such as decrease of commitment, low morale and increasing of job stress because inadequate of training, refuse to empowerment and less authority awareness. Moreover, the intention to leave has significant relationship with psychological empowerment (Koberg et al., 1999). Feelings of empowerment were associated with decreased propensity to leave the organization. Koberg et al. (1999) used questionnaire and distribute to technical, professional, and managerial staffs working in private general hospital in a major western metropolitan area.

*Organizational Commitment* - Generally, organizational commitment is recognized as an individual's recognition with a particular organization, the internalization of the values and goals of that organization, and the willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization (Angle & Perry, 1981; Bateman & Strasser, 1984; Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979; Porter, 1979; Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian, 1974, cited in Griffin and Hepburn, 2005). Commitment to an organization represents loyalty to the organization and desire for involvement in an organization (Lambert, 2004).

Definition of organizational commitment has been further refined and developed over the years (Chen & Francesco, 2001). It has been extensively studied because of its status as a core job attitude governing how employees attitudinally and behaviorally approach their works career (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986).

Studies indicate that high level of organizational commitment are associated with lower levels of absenteeism and turnover (Cohen, 1993, Mowday et al. 1979) and may serve as a basis for committed action (Reichers, 1985). Therefore, organizational commitment should be an important concern for organizational leadership. Most of the previous studies attempted to identify the linking between organizational commitment with work behavior including turnover (Porter et al., 1974; William and Hazer, 1986), absenteeism (Blau, 1964; Pierce & Dunham, 1987), job performance (DeCotiis & Summers, 1987; Steers, 1977; Chen & Francesco, 2003) and intention to leave (Williams & Hazer, 1986; Shore & Martin, 1989; Iverson & Buttigieg, 1999; Bozeman & Perrewe, 2001; Gautam, Van Dick & Wagner, 2001., 2001; Snape & Redman, 2003). The research by Porter, Steers, Mowday and Boulian (1974) reported that organizational commitment have significant link with psychiatry technician turnover. Organizational commitment level shows how long they tend to stay in organizational. Lower commitment level among employee shows that they will leave the organization soon. The commitment level among employee can be seen as a predictor whether the employee will stay longer or leave the organization.

## **Research Methodology**

This study is quantitative in nature using survey questionnaire as the main tool for data collection. The study proposed a research framework to test the relationship between PE and OC as shown in Figure 1.

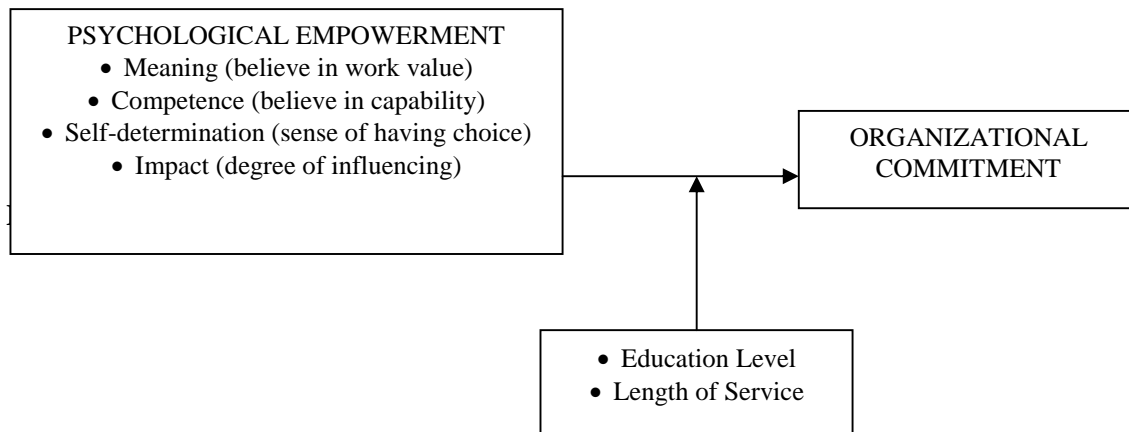


Figure 1 : Theoretical Framework

Thus, the study tested the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship between PE and OC.

Hypothesis 1(a): There is a significant relationship between meaning and OC.

Hypothesis 1(b): There is a significant relationship between competence and OC.

Hypothesis 1(c): There is a significant relationship between self-determination and OC.

Hypothesis 1(d): There is a significant relationship between impact and OC.

Hypothesis 2: Education level significantly moderates the relationship between PE and OC.

Hypothesis 2(a): Education level significantly moderates the relationship between self-determination and OC.

Hypothesis 2(b): Education level significantly moderates the relationship between impact and OC.

Hypothesis 3: Length of service significantly moderates the relationship between PE and OC.

Hypothesis 3(a): Length of service significantly moderates the relationship between self-determination and OC.

Hypothesis 3(b): Length of service significantly moderates the relationship between impact and OC.

To measure PE, the authors used Spreitzer (1992, 1995a) based on the definition given by Thomas and Velthouse (1990) and the instrument modified by Fulford and Enz (1995). The instrument has 12 items (3 items for each of the four dimensions). The Cronbach alphas are : meaning = 0.836 , competence = 0.823 , self-determination = 0.764 and impact = 0.903. For OC, the instrument by Mowday et al. (1979) was adopted. It has 15 items and a Cronbach alpha score of 0.841 (Appendix A). All the items are measured using a 7-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree.

The sampling method used was the convenience sampling method. This is the most widely used of all sampling techniques, and it is the least justifiable (Vogt, 2007). A total of 230 questionnaires were distributed to 20 construction companies in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah where 10 employees of each company were chosen randomly by the management as respondents. The respondents profile is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 : Respondents' Profile

Items	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	91	53.2
	Female	80	46.8
Race	Malay	52	30.4
	Chinese	36	21.1
	Sabah Native	64	37.4
	Others	19	11.1
Marital	Single	82	48.0
	Married	84	49.1
	Divorced	5	2.9

Education	Secondary School	44	25.7
	Certificate	25	14.6
	Diploma	47	27.5
	Bachelor Degree	53	31.0
	Masters	2	1.2
Salary	RM 500 – RM 1500	67	39.2
	RM 1600 - RM 2500	55	32.2
	RM 2600 - RM 3500	31	18.1
	RM 3600 and above	18	10.5
Designation	Administrator	61	35.7
	Supervisor	41	24.0
	Engineer/QS/Surveyor	38	22.2
	Manager	27	15.8
	Others	4	2.3
Tenure	Fresh (Less than 1 Year)	32	18.7
	Junior (1-5 Years)	75	43.9
	Senior (6 years and above)	64	37.4

n = 171

Data management and analysis was performed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The data from questionnaires were coded and analyzed. Methods of analysis used are descriptive statistic, linear regression and hierarchical linear regression.

### Research Findings

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for the variables. For overall PE, the mean is 5.3621, while for individual dimension, meaning scores the highest with a mean of 6.0234 followed by competence (6.1014), self-determination (5.3255) and impact (4.8168). The level of OC is moderate with a mean of 4.8265.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistic of Independent Variables and Dependent Variables

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Psychological Empowerment	1.92	6.50	5.3621	.77577
Meaning	1.00	7.00	6.0234	1.10707
Competence	1.33	7.00	6.1014	.95322
Self-Determination	1.33	7.00	5.3255	1.29451
Impact	1.00	7.00	4.8168	1.54588
Organizational Commitment	1.67	6.60	4.8265	1.00069

The regression test was used to test Hypotheses 1 namely 1a, b, c and d. Table 3 shows that overall, PE explains 29% of variance in OC. PE significantly affects the employees' OC.

Table 3 : Model Summary of Linear Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig. (F)
1	.538(a)	.290	.273	16.934	.000

a Predictors: (Constant), MeanImpact, MeanMeaning, MeanSelf-determination, MeanCompetence

b Dependent Variable: MeanCommitment

But if the four dimensions are considered separately (as shown in Table 4), only self-determination and impact significantly affect OC. Meaning and competence do not influence OC significantly. Consequently, the results show a partial support for Hypotheses 1.

Table 4 : The Results of Multiple Regressions

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2.627	.443		5.930	.000		
	Meaning	.156	.082	.173	1.902	.059	.519	1.925
	Competence	.066	.097	.062	.677	.499	.503	1.988
	Self-determination	-.158	.067	-.204	-2.349	.020	.566	1.768
	Impact	.353	.053	.545	6.688	.000	.644	1.554

Dependent Variable: MeanOrganizationalCommitment

For the moderating effect of education level and length of service, the hierarchical regression analysis show that there is no significant moderating effect of both demographic factors on the relationship between PE and OC (refer to Table 5 and 6). Therefore, Hypotheses 2 and 3 are both rejected.

Table 5 : Moderating Effect Of Education Level

Variables	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
Self-determination	-.089	.166	-.068	.300	-.255	.087
Impact	.363	.000	.355	.000	.139	.340
Education	-	-	-.093	.102	-.951	.000
Self-determination* Education	-	-	-	-	.095	.089
Impact* Education	-	-	-	-	.072	.131
R Square	.251		.263		.314	
Sig. F Change	.000		.102		.003	

a Dependent Variable: MeanOrganizationalCommitment

Table 6 : Moderating Effect Of Length Of Service

Variables	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
Self-determination	-.089	.166	-.073	.263	-.284	.112
Impact	.363	.000	.367	.000	.316	.076
Tenure			-.129	.177	-.779	.028
Self-determination* Tenure					.111	.176
Impact* Tenure					.016	.829
R Square	.251		.259		.254	
Sig. F Change	.000		.177		.157	

a Dependent Variable: MeanOrganizationalCommitment

The summary of hypotheses testing is shown in Table 7.

Table 7 : Summary Of Findings

No.	Hypotheses	Results
1	<p>Hypothesis 1: There is significant relationship between psychological empowerment dimensions and organizational commitment.</p> <p>Hypothesis 1(a): There is a significant relationship between meaning and organizational commitment.</p> <p>Hypothesis 1(b): There is a significant relationship between competence and organizational commitment.</p> <p>Hypothesis 1(c): There is a significant relationship between self-determination and organizational commitment.</p> <p>Hypothesis 1(d): There is a significant relationship between impact and organizational commitment.</p>	<p>Partially Supported</p> <p>Rejected</p> <p>Rejected</p> <p>Supported</p> <p>Supported</p>
2	<p>Hypothesis 2: Education level significantly moderates the relationship between PE and OC.</p> <p>Hypothesis 2(a): Education level significantly moderates the relationship between self-determination and OC.</p> <p>Hypothesis 2(d): Education level significantly moderates the relationship between impact and OC.</p>	<p>Rejected</p> <p>Rejected</p>
3	<p>Hypothesis 3: Length of service significantly moderates the relationship between PE and OC.</p> <p>Hypothesis 3(a): Length of service significantly moderates the relationship between self-determination and OC.</p> <p>Hypothesis 3(b): Length of service significantly moderates the relationship between impact and OC.</p>	<p>Rejected</p> <p>Rejected</p>

## Discussion

### *Level of PE and OC among respondents*

The findings showed that construction employees do experience empowerment in the workplace and committed to their organization. The mean of the psychological empowerment is 5.3621 (7-point scale) which is well above average. The organizational commitment of the respondents is also above average which is 4.8265 (7-point scale). The results found that most of them are committed and tends to be dedicated to their organization.

The experience of empowerment is manifested in all four dimensions – if any one dimension is missing, then the experience of empowerment will be limited. For example, if people have discretion to make decisions (i.e., self-determination) but they don't care about the kinds of decisions they can make (i.e., they lack a sense of meaning), they will not feel empowered. Alternatively, if people believe they can make an impact but don't feel like they have the skills and abilities to do their job well (i.e., they lack a sense of competence), they will not feel empowered as well (Spreitzer, 2007). It is suggested by Thomas and Velthouse (1990) that empowered employee should perform better than those who are relatively less empowered. Spreitzer (1995a) argues that empowered employees are likely to be seen as effective because they proactively execute their responsibility. This is because they see themselves as competent and able to influence their jobs and work environments in meaningful ways (Dewettinck et al., 2003).

### *Relationship between PE and OC*

As stated in the results section, two of the PE dimensions have positive relationship with the organizational commitment, namely the self-determination and impact. The respondents agreed that their organizational commitment will increase when they are given the autonomy to making decision about work methods, pace and effort. They also commit their loyalty to the organization when they believed they can influence strategic, administrative or operating outcomes at workplace. However the other two psychological empowerment dimensions have no positive relationship with the organizational commitment that is the meaning and competence.

Although the respondents value and organization value is similar, it's still not enough for them to be loyal to the organization. It is the same with competence, even though the respondents are confident with their ability perform a particular task, it does not guarantee their commitment towards their organization.

The results are consistent with other previous study that is not all psychological empowerment dimensions have positive relationship to any particular variables. For example, Kraimer et al. (1999) found that only self-determination and impact dimension have positive relationship with organizational commitment. On the other hand, influence of type of work (management and non-management) in relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational commitment has been conducted by Cunningham and Hyman (1996). Their findings points out that, psychological empowerment among the management staff has increased their commitment. However, for non-management staffs psychological empowerment creates problem to them such as a decrease of commitment, low morale and increasing of job stress due to inadequate of training, refuse to empowerment and less authority awareness. So for this study, it can be concluded that employees of the construction companies have identical value with their organization. However, they still tend to leave the organization if there is better offer elsewhere.

### ***The moderating effect of education level and tenure on the relationship***

The results showed that education level and length of service do not significantly moderate the relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational commitment. This is due to the same opinion of the respondents regardless their qualification and their tenure with the current organization. This findings was consistent with Sagie's work (1998) (cited in Tatus, 2000) that discusses employee absenteeism, organizational commitment and job satisfaction; it did not explore the relationship between length of service and job satisfaction. It found that intention to quit, which is of some relevance to length of service, was not significantly related with either voluntary or involuntary absenteeism.

A number of earlier studies suggested that the length of service in a job could be used to estimate the levels of job satisfaction of workers. The assumption is that the less satisfied workers tend to resign while the more satisfied ones tend to remain in a job. Consistent with this thinking, a negative relationship between job satisfaction and turnover has been reported by several researchers (Atchinson & Lefferts, 1975; Karp et al., 1973; Locke, 1976; Mobley et al., 1979, cited in Titus, 2000).

### **Conclusion**

The main objective of this research is to see the relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational commitment among employees in the construction sector in Kota Kinabalu. The research also interested to see the influence of educational level and length of service as moderating factors. Based on the data collected and analyzed using statistical analysis, it can be concluded that was a significant relationship between the variables. However, for the psychological empowerment dimensions, the findings showed that it is partially supported namely meaning and competence that do not influence the organizational commitment, whereas self-determination and impact do influenced their commitment to the organization. Employers should also treat their employees better in order to retain good and talented people in their organization.

Since the R square is only 29.90%, this indicates that, there are other important variables besides psychological empowerment that influence the organizational commitment. For example, most of the previous studies attempted to identify the linking between organizational commitment with work behavior including turnover (Porter et al., 1974; William & Hazer, 1986), absenteeism (Blau, 1986; Pierce & Dunham, 1987), job performance (DeCotiis & Summers, 1987; Steers, 1977; Chen & Francesco, 2003) and intention to leave (Williams & Hazer, 1986; Shore & Martin, 1989; Iverson & Buttigieg, 1999; Bozeman & Perrewew, 2001; Gautam et al., 2001; Snape & Redman, 2003). The data do not represent the whole employees in the construction sector but the findings present a clear trend on the relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational commitment. However the objectives of this research have successfully been achieved. Lastly, hopefully this research will contribute a great deal towards a better and ideal way of overall organizational management and human capital management in particular.

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